Jane Cable

... By ...

GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON,

Author of "Beverly of Graustark," Etc.

(Continued.)

The strange character of the man was best shown by the pictures that adorned or rather disfigured the walls. Vulgar photographs and prints were to be seen on all sides. Mingled with these cheap creations were excellent copies of famous Madonnas, quaint Scriptural drawings, engravings of the Saviour and an allegorical colored print which emphasized the joys of heaven. There was also a badly drawn but idealized portrait of Droom, done in crayon at the age of twenty. This portrait was one of his prized possessions. He loved it best because it was a bust and did not expose his longitudinal defects. If Droom ever had entertained a feminine visitor in his apartments, there is no record of the fact. But few men had seen the interior of his home, and they had gone away with distressed, perplexed sensibilities.

He cooked his own meals on the oil stove and, alone, ate them from the little table that stood near the heater. Occasionally he went out to a nearby eating house for a lonely feast. His rooms usually reeked with the odor of boiled coffee, burned cabbage and grease, pungent chemicals and long suffering bed linen. Of his "front" room it may be said that it was kitchen, dining room, parlor, library, workshop, laboratory and conservatory. Four flowerpots, in which as many geraniums existed with difficulty despite Droom's constant and unwavering care, occupied a conspicuous place on the window sills overlooking the street. He watched over them with all the tender solicitude of a lover, surprising as it may appear when one pauses to consider the vicious exterior of the man.

Droom was frugal. He was, in truth, a miser. If any one had asked him what he expected to do with the money he was putting away in the bank, he could not have answered, calculating as he was by nature. He had no relative to whom he would leave it, and he had no inclination to give up the habit of active employment. His salary was small, but he managed to save more than half of it—for a "rainy day," as he said. He did his reading and experimenting by kerosene light and went to bed by candlelight, saving a few pennies a week in that way. The windows in his apartment were washed not oftener than once a year. He was seldom obliged to look through them during the day, and their only duty at night was to provide ventilation, and even that was characteristically meager.

He was a man of habit, not habits. A pipe at night was his only form of dissipation. It was not too far for him to walk home from the office of evenings, and he invariably did so unless the weather was extremely unpleasant. So methodical was he that he never had walked over any other bridge than the one in Wells street, coming and going.

Past sixty-five years of age, Droom's hair still was black and snaky, his teeth were as yellow and jagged as they were in the seventies, and his eyes were as blue and ugly as ever. He had not aged with James Bansemer. In truth, he looked but little older than when we made his acquaintance. The outside world knew no more of Droom's private transactions than it knew of Bansemer's. Up in the horrid little apartment in Wells street the queer old man could do as he willed, unobserved and unannoyed. He could pursue his experiments with strange chemicals, he could construct odd devices with his kit of tools, and he could let off an endless amount of inventive energy that no one knew he possessed.

When he left Graydon Bansemer on the sidewalk in front of the office building he swung off with his long strides toward the Wells street bridge. His brain had laid aside everything that had occupied its attention during office hours and had given itself over to the project that hastened his steps homeward. His supper that night was a small one and hurriedly eaten in order that he might get to work on his new device. Droom grinned and cackled to himself all alone up there in the lamplight, for he was perfecting an "invention" by which the honest citizen could successfully put to rout the "holdup" man that has made Chicago famous.

Elias Droom's inventive genius unfailingly led him toward devices that could inflict pain and discomfiture. His plan to get the better of the wretched, hard working holdup man was unique, if not entirely practical. He was constructing the models for two little bulbs, made of rubber and lined with a material that would resist the effects of an acid, no matter how powerful. On one end of each bulb, which was capable of holding at least an ounce of liquid, there was a thin syringe attachment, also proof against acids. These little bulbs were made so that they could be held in the palm of the hand. By squeezing them suddenly a liquid could be shot from the tube with considerable force.

The bulbs were to contain vitriol.

When the holdup man gave the command to "hold up your hands," the victim had only to squeeze the bulb as the hands went up, and if accurately aimed the miscreant would get the stream of the deadly vitriolic fluid in his eyes and—here endeth the first lesson. Experience alone could do the rest.

Young Bansemer hurried to their apartments on the north side. He found his father dressed and ready to go out to dinner.

"Well, how was everything today?" asked James Bansemer from his easy chair in the library. Graydon threw his hat and gloves on the table.

"Terribly dull market, governor," he said. "It's been that way for a week. How are you feeling?"

"Fit to dine with a queen," answered the older man, with a smile. "How soon can you dress for dinner, Gray?"

"That depends on who is giving the dinner."

"Some people you like. I found the note here when I came in a little after 5. We have an hour in which to get over there. Can you be ready?"

"Do you go security for the affair?" asked Graydon.

"Certainly. You have been there, my boy, and I've not heard you complain."

"You mean over at"—

"Yes; that's where I mean," said the other, breaking in quietly.

"I think I can be ready in ten minutes, father."

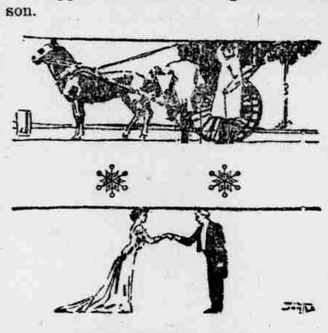
While he was dressing his father sat alone and stared reflectively at the small blue gas blaze in the gate. A dark, grim smile unconsciously came over his face, the inspiration of a triumphant joy. Twice he read the dainty note that met him on his return from the office.

"What changes time can make in woman," he mused, "and what changes a woman can make in time! For nearly a year I've waited for this note. I knew it would come; it was bound to come. Graydon has had everything up to this time, while I have waited patiently in the background. Now it is my turn."

"All right, father," called Graydon from the hall. "The cab is at the door."

Together they went down the steps, arm in arm, strong figures.

"To Mr. David Cable's," ordered Bansemer, the father, complacently as he stepped into the carriage after his son.



CHAPTER VII.

JAMES BANSEMER had not recklessly rushed into Mrs. Cable's presence with threats of exposure; but, on the contrary, he had calmly, craftily waited. It suited his purpose to let her wonder, dread and finally develop the trust that her secret was safe with him. Occasionally he had visited the Cable box in the theater, not infrequently he had dined with them in the downtown cafes and at the homes of mutual acquaintances, but this was the first time that James Bansemer had enjoyed the hospitality of Frances Cable's home. His son, on the best of terms with their daughter, was a frequent visitor there.

There was a rare bump of progressiveness in the character of Graydon Bensemer. He was good looking enough beyond doubt, and there was a vast degree of personal magnetism about him. It seemed but natural that he should readily establish himself as a friend and a favorite of the fair Miss Cable. For some time James Bansemer had watched his son's progress with the Cable family, not once allowing his personal interest to manifest itself. It was but a question of time until Mrs. Cable's suspense and anxiety would bring her to him one way or another. Every word that fell from the lips of his son regarding the Cables held his attention, and it was not long before he saw the family history as clearly as though it were an open book, and he knew far more than the open book revealed.

Frances Cable was not deluded by his silence and aloofness. But she was unable to devise means to circumvent him. Constant fear of his power to crush lurked near her day and night. Conscious of her weakness, but eager to have done with the strife, sometimes she longed for the enemy to advance. At first she distrusted and despised the son, but his very fairness battered down the barriers of prejudice, and real admiration succeeded. Her husband liked him immensely, and Jane was his ablest ally. David Cable regarded him as one of the brightest young men on the stock exchange and predicted that some day he would be an influential member of the great brokerage firm for which he now acted as confidential clerk. Mr. Clegg, the senior member of the firm of Clegg, Groll & Davidson, his employers, personally had recommended young Bansemer to Cable, and he was properly impressed.

Graydon's devotion to Jane did not go unnoticed. This very condition should have assured Mrs. Cable that James Bansemer had kept her secret zealously. There was nothing to indicate that the young man knew the story of the foundling.

It was not until some weeks after the chance meeting in Hooley's theater that Mrs. Cable came into direct contact with James Bansemer's designs. She had met him at two or three formal affairs, but their conversations had been of the most conventional character. On the other hand, her husband had lunched and dined at the club with the lawyer. At first she dreaded the outcome of these meetings, but as Cable's attitude toward her remained unchanged she began to realize that Bansemer, whatever his purpose, was loyal.

They met at last quite informally at Mrs. Clegg's dinner, a small and congenial affair. When the men came into the drawing room after the cigars Mrs. Cable, with not a little trepidation, motioned to Mr. Bansemer to draw up his chair beside her.

"I have been looking forward with pleasure to this opportunity, Mr. Bansemer," she said in a courteously acidulated way. "It has been so long in coming."

"Better late than never," he returned, with marked emphasis. Fortunately for her the challenging significance of his words was quickly nullified by the smile with which she was almost instantly favored. "Twenty years, I believe—it certainly came very near being 'never,'" he went on, abruptly changing from harsh to the sweetest of tones. "No one could believe that you—you're simply wonderful!" and added pointedly, "But your daughter is even more beautiful, if such is possible, than her—her mother."

(To be Continued.)